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ABSTRACT

A printing and/or duplicating center can be a valuable addition to any school and the learning resources center is a likely host for it, as many functions of the media production staff are similar to those needed to support a duplicating center, and grouping similar functions is good management practice. However, several things should be considered before such an arrangement is made, e.g., the level of service to be offered, systems of control and supply, the availability of personnel, the need for maintenance, and the manner in which the activity will be funded. When added to the natural tendency for printing services to absorb nearby resources, a real potential for failure is created for the unwary administrator. (Author/JEG)

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ORGANIZING BASIC PRINTING SERVICES IN THE LRC

by

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Perhaps the best place to begin a discussion of printing or duplicating services as part of any learning resources center is to consider why to include them at all. The major factors influencing the decision to establish a duplicating center anywhere in the school will probably be considerations of finances or of administrative convenience.

In most cases, I expect a Xerox machine or some other copier was leased or purchased as the need was felt, and was made available to all departments and offices without anyone really being in charge, and without any formal procedures set up, beyond maybe having to bring your own paper or something like that. Probably the business office or some other office near the machine was responsible for adding toner and for calling the repair agency when the thing broke down. That's the way it started at my school, and things limped along that way for several years until the Xerox copier was out of order more than it was in.

Meanwhile, the college went outside for the printing of its recruiting materials and other documents that needed to be more polished. Because of the cost involved, outside printing was severely limited and required approval at the highest levels of administration.

As I expect happens in many cases, the school administration saw its printing costs increasing while no one really had available all of the printing service they felt they needed. As the administration dreamed of reducing costs while making printing more available, the urge to purchase an offset press became irresistable. This is a dangerous stage, for the logic is flawed, the savings largely imaginary, and seldom will the administration follow through to do it right. This is the time for clear thinking, for tough decisions about what sort of printing services are really needed, and for the establishment of realistic expectations about any financial benefits which might follow.

This is not something to be entered into casually. The nature of printing services is such that, once they are in place, they will quickly become indispensible, will generate an overwhelming demand for themselves, and will try to absorb all of the resources - time, personnel, and money - that come near.

There is some logic in placing the two together - grouping similar functions is classical organizational theory - and there is even some logic in placing both functions in the resource center. Before the printing and duplication function is permanently and irrevocably added to the LRC there are a number of things to be considered.

The first thing to consider is where the service will be included in your organization. The duplicating service will require the time and attention of some supervisor, so you should plan things so it will require no more of the LRC director's time than the director is willing to give. Exactly where it is included depends a great deal on the other elements in the organization.

Where the chain of command is short, the duplicating function might be more or less independent of the other LRC elements. This arrangement would require that day-to-day supervision be provided for or that a relatively mature and experienced operator be employed.

Another arrangement might be to group the duplicating service with other non-book activities under the general heading of media production. Since layout and design may be provided be existing graphics personnel, placing them under a common supervisor would help ensure appropriate coordination and cooperation. Such coordination could minimize the conflict between the production schedules of the various elements, and avoid the accumulation of delays so often present when the patron must make separate arrangements with several departments. There are, of course, as many possibilities as there are LRC's.

A second consideration is the range of services to be offered at the start. In most instances, the duplicating service will start small and grow

as demand requires and resources permit. Beginning printing services might be limited to one-color and line art only. In addition to Xerox copying, which I've already mentioned, existing mimeograph and spirit duplication equipment can provide back-up services and might be included.

Another level of service might include collateral activities such as collating, folding and binding. This would permit the printing center to deliver a finished package to the patron.

The highest level of service might also include multicolor and half-tone reproduction, as well as typesetting or other composition-related functions.

The levels of service outlined here are not prerequisite to one another, and specific equipment features might suggest some other order. For instance, the particular characteristics of the press you purchase might dictate that more elaborate printing should precede the addition of collateral services. When the money is available, the collateral functions - folding, collating and binding - will support all reproduction methods and offer a great deal of service for the money.

Whatever the order of expansion it should be planned in advance. Each stage should contribute to a long-range view of what the duplicating center should be like.

In addition to settling on the organization and initial scope of the duplicating service, there are several potential problem areas which should be considered before you begin.

First, get advance agreement on the extent of services to be offered. If the duplicating center is primarily intended to save money be eliminating or reducing outside printing of such things as forms, brochures, and the like, set stringent limits on all other printing. In any case, be prepared to handle more requests for more than you expected, and requests for more types of services than you intended to offer. Agreement in advance from the highest administrative levels is necessary if you are to avoid being pressed

into accepting more than you can handle.

Second, establish systems of control and supply before opening for business. Once you have begun to accept duplicating requests, you will not have time to think carefully through the necessary management processes. This is nothing you can make up as you go along. You must establish in advance methods for receiving requests, keeping track of the requests during production, and returning the completed job to the customer. It is important that your records be adequate to prove that a request was or was not received; printed, billed, and for how much; and was or was not received and taken away by the customer. This may seem like a burden at first, but the day will come sooner than you like when someone will come to pick up a job and it won't be there. Complete records can help maintain the credibility of your service at that point. Published procedures or guidelines can be helpful also. They may be changed as often as necessary, and may be selectively ignored as needed to make the service run smoothly.

The logistics involved also demand attention. As soon as the services become institutionalized - that is, when they become a part of the LRC organization - the little lapses that were once taken for granted - the absence of paper or toner when they are needed - will no longer be tolerated by the patrons of the service.

Every detail surrounding the support of the duplicating center becomes the object of concern. The decision about how much paper should be transferred each day from where it is stored to where it will be used - what colors, weights, and lengths - must be the responsibility of some person. In addition, the paper must be ordered in advance of the need. In our case more than 40 cases each month, along with plates, blankets, fountain solutions, toner, fuser oil and all of the other items necessary for the duplicating center to function.

Third, limit activities to what available personnel can accomplish. Funds for "start-up" equipment are fairly easy to get, but personnel funds are probably the most difficult to find. You must have trained personnel to operate or be prepared to train them yourself. When your service has reached its limit, make every new activity replace some old activity. This may not make you especially popular but when you are no longer able to deliver on your promises, you won't be popular anyway. This is probably the most difficult thing to manage.

Next, get maintenance agreements on the press and all other principle equipment. Most maintenance agreements include two features: regular preventive maintenance visits during which the machines will be adjusted to conform to specifications; and no-cost repair visits, usually including parts and labor. The preventive maintenance included is the more important of the two. Without regular preventive maintenance (much of it beyond the capability of all but the most experienced press operator) you may find yourself haunted by adjustment problems. Although parts and labor are usually covered by warranties, adjustments are often not provided beyond the first few weeks or months. You may find yourself paying substantial sums for service even during the first year. Keeping the equipment in proper adjustment is necessary to maintain efficiency and reduce the inevitable frustrations. If a preventive maintenance agreement cannot be had, try to schedule regular monthly or bi-monthly service calls for that purpose.

Use your budget as a control device. There are three possibilities for funding the operation: full subsidy; no subsidy; and partial subsidy. They do not offer equal opportunities for limiting the copying volume to a reasonable rate of growth.

If the service is fully subsidized, with no charge to the user, the copies may be seen as having no value. With no incentive to limit copying,

the number of copies will rise quickly and endlessly, and operating costs will soar. If this happens within a fixed budget you will soon be deciding what does and does not get copied. Each request turned down at the duplicating center will be appealed to the LRC director and that person will do nothing else from then on. Some built-in restraining device must be present.

If there is no subsidy at all; if all costs must be recovered by the center other problems will occur. There will be fixed costs such as equipment leases, maintenance payments and salaries which will accrue whether any copying is done or not. Requiring payment of duplicating charges from departmental supply budgets - even if they are beefed up - will almost certainly hold down copying, but it may force the duplicating center to actively seek work to maintain minimum levels of activity. This might raise the volume of copying artificailly and raise operating costs unnecessarily.

Partially subsidy is often selected as the best funding method. It acknowledges the need for a certain minimum level of support without promoting unnecessary duplicating. Partial subsidy permits the duplicating center to charge for services rendered, and forces the patrons to assign priorities rather than the center or the LRC director.

There are at least three kinds of partial subsidy:

You may subsidize all jobs up to a given dollar amount and have the patron pay the remainder;

You may charge the patron a certain percentage of costs while the school subsidizes the rest; or

You may subsidize staff time and/or equipment and charge back materials costs only.

The choice of funding method depends on individual circumstances, but whenever there is a charge-back there must be some bookkeeping and you must be prepared for that.

In any case where costs are to be passed on, in whole or in part, it is important to be able to determine the costs of any item or service. In computing the cost, both direct and indirect costs must be considered.

Direct costs are those associated with a specific job and are usually easy to identify and quantify. For offset printing, direct costs may include staff time, equipment depreciation, and operating supplies directly assignable to a job such as paper, and masters or plates. Using actual or estimated impressions per unit it is fairly easy to determine a cost-per-impression figure.

Indirect costs are those which benefit more than a single job, such as fountain solutions, toner, or other items not difficult to identify but hard to assign to an individual job.

Finally, you must make provisions to comply with the copyright law. When copying becomes institutionalized in this way, the responsibility for infringements may no longer lie solely with the individual requesting the copy, as it does on properly marked unsupervised machines. The requirements are not terribly strenuous but they should be considered.

In summary, a printing and duplicating center can be a valuable addition to any school and the Learning Resources Center is a likely host for it. If you anticipate as many of the problems as you can, wait until you are ready to begin, and maintain reasonable expectations, it can provide an enjoyable and satisfying experience for everyone concerned.